



EPISODE 2x22: “Wake”

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“Serenity” Motion Picture by Joss Whedon

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INT. BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – DAY

CLOSE ON RIVER TAM'S closed eyes.

She opens them, looks slyly side-to-side.

PULL BACK to find that River stands in the middle of the room, surrounded by Reaver corpses. She holds two Reaver blades, is bloody but unbowed.

Industrial-strength CONSTRUCTION MACHINES—little more than half-visible silhouettes behind the mess—have torn open the wall behind her, leaving a gap filled with rubble, smoke, and fire.

River tenses but does not turn as heavily-armed ALLIANCE SOLDIERS come through the smoke.

A half dozen. A dozen.

More.

IN THE HALLWAY FACING THE ALCOVE

MALCOLM REYNOLDS looks down at ZOE and JAYNE as if to say "Now what?"

INARA crouches protectively over the unconscious SIMON TAM and KAYLEE, and BEN HICKS looks like he's reached his limit.

IN THE ALCOVE

The soldiers pour in and circle around River, full of nervous energy, all of them yelling at once, pointing their rifles every which way.

SOLDIER #1
Drop your weapons!

SOLDIER #2
Drop 'em now!

IN THE HALLWAY

Mal moves forward.

IN THE ALCOVE

The room is flaming chaos. BAKER, the ranking officer, tries to remain calm, but she looks like she's on the verge of losing it.

SOLDIER #1
Do we engage? Do we engage?

SOLDIER #2
We have a kill order on these people!

River still hasn't turned. Blood drips off the Reaver blades. She looks straight down the hallway at Mal.

BAKER
Hold on! Hold on!

IN THE HALLWAY

Mal looks back at River. Nods slightly.

SOLDIER #2 (OS)
These rutters brought the Reavers down on us!

Jayne and Zoe sense it, too. They join Mal, flanking him. The trio hobbles forward, ready to go out in a blaze of glory.

It's a Butch and Sundance moment.

IN THE ALCOVE

River lowers her head, smiles grimly.

The soldiers edge forward.

BAKER
Hold on!

CLOSE ON: SOLDIER #2'S FINGER, SQUEEZING THE TRIGGER...

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR – SAME TIME

From behind, we see THE OPERATIVE, still pinned where Mal left him, still looking at the screen projecting the MIRANDA FEED.

On the two-dimensional screen, CARON screams.

BAKER (via com speaker, cont'd)
Do we have the order?!?

INT. BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

Mal, Zoe, and Jayne reach the doorway.

River starts to turn toward the soldiers, raising her blades—

WHITEOUT

EXT. MIRANDA – CITY STREETS – POV: CAMERA

We're watching RECORDED FOOTAGE. There are images of MIRANDA—of bodies, on the street, in homes and offices... image after image, most of them shaky shots, taken with some sort of handheld camera.

Flashing in red at the bottom of the screen: the words SEND SIGNAL TO ALL.

DR. CARON (VO)

These are just a few of the images we recorded. As you can see it isn't... it isn't what we thought. There's been no war here, and no terraforming event.

We see the highway of abandoned cars the crew discovered in Episode 2x19: MIRANDA.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

The environment is stable.

INT. HOSPITAL BREAK ROOM – SAME TIME

A half-dozen DOCTORS sit in a break room, maybe in the hospital from "ARIEL." Some hold forgotten food; all watch the CORVUE SCREEN, captivated:

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

It's the Pax. The G-32 Paxilon Hydrochlorate that we added to the air processors. It's...

(tearing up)

...well, it works... it was supposed to calm the population, weed out aggression. Make a peaceful...

INT. ROWDY TAVERN – SAME TIME

This is the kind of rough and tumble place our crew frequents. The news seems to travel across the CROWD in ripples, spreading out from the CORVUE mounted above the bar.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
It worked. The people here stopped fighting. And then
they stopped everything else.

Heads turn. Folk move toward the bar.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
They stopped going to work, stopped breeding... talking...
eating...

In the back of the room, a group of ROUGHNECKS abandons a pool table mid-game.

INT. EXPENSIVE LIVING ROOM – SAME TIME

A TIRED OLD MAN sits alone in his well-appointed living room watching his CORVUE. He drains a GLASS OF BRANDY.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
(trying for control)
There's thirty million people here, and they all just let
themselves die.

He puts down the glass, never taking his eyes off the screen. Picks up a PISTOL.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
They didn't even kill themselves. They just...

He puts the gun in his mouth.

INT. BENA COMPANION TRAINING HOUSE – CLASSROOM – SAME TIME

Two dozen YOUNG COMPANIONS are seated in the room, under lockdown and the watchful eye of a half dozen ALLIANCE SOLDIERS. Companion and soldier alike watch the CORVUE SCREEN at the front of the room.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
Most starved. When they stopped working the power
grids, there were overloads, fires – the people burned to
death sitting in their chairs. Just sitting.

There is a loud METALLIC BANG from the CorVue. One of the Companions jumps. A soldier puts a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

INT. RIM WORLD CHURCH – SAME TIME

It's a humble little church on a humble little world. The place could pass for Haven... if Haven hadn't been destroyed. A PREACHER stands in front of a congregation of two dozen or so. Also at the altar: a set of GOLD CANDLESTICKS that are likely the pride of the church, if not the town.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

I have to be quick. We can't leave. We can't take any of the local transports because...

A series of bangs now... which coincide with the doors being thrown open and the footsteps of a YOUNG MAN rushing in.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

There are people... they aren't people... about a tenth of a percent of the population had the opposite reaction to the Pax.

The young man mouths one word: Reavers!

The congregation reacts. Men ready themselves for action. Women gather children close. Most rush for the door. The candlesticks are knocked down and forgotten.

EXT. SIHHON – XINTING CITY – STREET – SAME TIME

This is same the crowded city street that Book walked down in Episode 2x17: TESTAMENT as news of the war broke.

PEOPLE stand in front of the LARGE CORVUE MONITORS that fill storefronts everywhere.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

Their aggression response increased... beyond madness... they've killed most of us... not just killed... they've done... things...

We scan the FACES of the people here. Their reactions aren't much different than those of the church-goers: shock, fear, anger... Mostly shock.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)

I won't live to report this, and we haven't got power to... people have to know...

We settle on one face: GRACE. Older and grayer now, but still vital.

She smiles with cold satisfaction.

The camera begins to go around her head, catching her left side in profile. We circle around to THE BACK OF HER HEAD—

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
(loses it here)
...We meant it for the best...

INT. BASEMENT, OVER THE GENERATOR – SAME TIME

—which MATCH-CUTS AND BECOMES THE BACK OF THE OPERATIVE'S HEAD, although we don't realize that until we come around to his right side in profile.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
To make people safer...

He's crying.

DR. CARON (VO, cont'd)
To... God!

CLOSE ON the Operative's face: stunned, overwhelmed. Tears flow freely.

Now, the sounds of the real world—voices over his COM UNIT—mix with the chaotic sounds of the Miranda feed.

SOLDIER #2 (via com)
These rutters brought the Reavers down on us!

A gun fires offscreen as part of the Miranda feed.

BAKER (via com)
Hold on!

Caron screams offscreen.

BAKER (via com, cont'd)
Do we have the order?!?

The screaming continues.

The Operative closes his eyes. He tries to choke out a few words. Fails. Coughs.

Then:

OPERATIVE
Stand down.

INT. BLACK ROOM ALCOVE – SAME TIME

No one moves. They all look at each other, confused. Did they hear it right?

Then we hear the Operative again, from the dozen or so helmet mics. There's a world of weariness in his voice.

OPERATIVE (via com, cont'd)

The situation is cold.

(choking cough)

The civilians are not to be harmed.

A long beat, then everyone seems to stand down—

CLOSE ON: SOLDIER #2'S TRIGGER FINGER...

It squeezes inadvertently. We hear a small click—

And it eases off.

Mal lets out a long breath. Lowers his gun. He smiles a little, takes a step toward River—

And collapses, falling flat on his face.

Blood begins to spread from his belly wound.



Act One

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – MILITARY BRIG

CLOSE ON Zoe's closed eyes.

JAYNE (OS)

I don't like it.

PULL BACK to a BIRD'S EYE VIEW of Zoe stretched out on a cot, flat on her back.

BEN (OS)

What's not to like?

We pull away from Zoe, apparently sleeping, to find the crew—or at least Zoe, Ben, Inara, and Jayne—in a HOLDING CELL. The room is a tight fit, with two cots embedded in each wall, another level of pull-down cots set above them, and a sink and toilet squeezed into one corner.

BEN (cont'd)
We got the finest accommodations the Alliance can offer.

Ben sits on the edge of one of the cots, while Jayne paces what little room there is.

JAYNE
Don't like bein' caged is all.

Inara's standing by the CLEAR PLASTIC wall and door at one end of the holding cell. No old-fashioned bars here. The Alliance is sophisticated.

INARA
Are you that anxious to be interrogated?

JAYNE
Just wanna know what they done with Kaylee.
(only a slight pause)
An' Mal.

INARA
And the Tams.

JAYNE
(shrugs)
If you say so.

BEN
Last I seen, there was a fight of a largish nature goin' on, so it could be that the Alliance got themselves bigger fish to fry than little old us.

Jayne stops his pacing.

JAYNE
Fightin's done. Alliance come out on top.

INARA
What makes you so sure?

JAYNE
We was in the thick, we'd feel it, even a ship this size.

Ben settles back on his cot.

BEN
Don't matter. Either way, it seems they forgot us for now. Which I'm all manner of okay with. If we gotta vote on waitin' versus execution, I know what column I'm pickin'.

INARA

The Alliance isn't going to execute us.

BEN

(leaning forward)

Ain't they? Here's what got me concerned: we ain't been bound by law.

JAYNE

(missing the point)

Speak for yourself. I have. More than once.

Inara rolls her eyes.

BEN

You an' me both, big man, but it's today I'm talkin' about. We ain't been bound by law today.

JAYNE

So?

BEN

We ain't nowhere on the grid. Don't exist. They can do what they want with us, no one'll be none the wiser. Ever.

Jayne starts pacing again.

JAYNE

This is <insane>. They're gonna kill us.

INARA

They're not going to kill us. They—

JAYNE

(panicking a little)

Already done in everyone we knowed. Why stop now?

BEN

We're really just witnesses, ain't we?

INARA

It's not true. If we were slated for execution, we'd already be dead. The medics wouldn't have patched us up before they brought us here. They—

OPERATIVE (OS)

She's quite right.

The Operative stands on the other side of the clear plastic wall, flanked by two Alliance soldiers. He's in pretty sorry shape: his face is bruised and battered, with one arm in a sling.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

I do not squander resources. If it will set your mind at ease...

(looks especially at Ben)

You are bound by law.

JAYNE

(bitter glance at Ben)

Well, I feel better.

INARA

Where are the others?

OPERATIVE

They've been taken to the infirmary. Kaylee has been given a battery of antitoxins and seems to be responding appropriately. The others—

Jayne moves up to the clear wall and interrupts.

JAYNE

What about us?

OPERATIVE

You will be charged with whatever crimes against the Alliance I see fit, and processed accordingly. Were I you, I'd not be in too much of a hurry to get out of this cell.

INARA

What about M— What about the others?

OPERATIVE

Reynolds and Doctor Tam have been stabilized, but both require surgery.

INARA

And is this the part where you talk about not squandering precious resources?

(off the Operative's silence)

Will they live?

OPERATIVE

I am neither physician nor fortune-teller. But your captain is *<solidly-built>*. If I were a betting man, I'd put money on him having a long future in a prison camp out on the Rim.

Jayne appraises the Operative.

JAYNE (cont'd)

Looks like he did a number on you.

OPERATIVE

He gave as good as he got.

JAYNE

'cept I don't see no near-fatal belly wound on you.

The Operative blinks; he really doesn't know what to do with Jayne. No one speaks for a moment.

INARA

Take me to them.

OPERATIVE

I'm afraid I can't honor that request. You've been bound—

INARA

It wasn't a request.

OPERATIVE

(scoffs)

This is not a negotiation.

He moves closer to Inara, staring her down. They hold one another's gazes for a beat. Two. Then Inara looks down.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You are not in a position of authority. Your freedom – your very lives – are in my hands. Your friends draw air because I permit it.

ZOE (OS)

Then just do it already.

Everyone is surprised to see Zoe on her feet and moving toward the clear wall at a stately, implacable pace. Inara and Jayne move out of her way.

ZOE (cont'd)
Finish what you started.

Zoe and the Operative face off through the clear wall.

There's a slight, odd smile on Zoe's lips—the smile of someone with nothing left to lose. The Operative's expression isn't very different, really.

This time, it's the Operative who looks away.

Inara seems to sense that something has changed.

INARA
Take me to them. Please.

The Operative looks from Inara to Zoe. Then he nods tiredly.

EXT. SPACE OVER MR. UNIVERSE'S MOON – ESTABLISHING

A group of ALLIANCE VESSELS rests in the ION CLOUD above the moon, half-hidden, like ships in a misty harbor. WARBIRDS and PICKET SHIPS prowl protectively around a pair of SUPERCRUISERS.

A SHUTTLE travels from one from one supercruiser to the other.

INT. SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

The Operative sits at the controls, Inara in the passenger seat.

INARA
Was it really necessary to separate us onto two different ships? Did you expect us to escape?

OPERATIVE
(not turning)
I certainly don't expect you to succeed.

Both stare straight ahead.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Inara, I... This is difficult for me to say. But... I am sorry.
(off Inara's stunned silence)
Perhaps it's too much to ask, but if you could find it in your heart to—

INARA

(snapping)

I know the next word out of your mouth is not going to be "forgive." Because that would be <madness even to the insane>. You've lied to me, manipulated me, forced me into betraying those I cared about. You killed Sheydra, and Buddha knows how many others! You... You can't... I'm afraid to even ask what you've done with River...

The Operative looks pointedly at his controls.

OPERATIVE

She's safe. River Tam is where it's safest for everyone.

They continue the flight in awkward silence.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – INFIRMARY – LATER

The infirmary holds two banks of six beds facing each other. Right now, only one bed is occupied, by a dozing Kaylee. A soldier stands guard at the door.

Inara tentatively enters the room, slowly approaching Kaylee, who smiles sleepily and waves to Inara. Inara rushes to Kaylee's side. When she reaches the bed, she leans down and gives the girl a big hug.

The Operative, standing in the doorway, signals the guard to leave, giving the women some privacy.

As Kaylee and Inara begin to speak quietly, the Operative watches them for a long moment, almost as if trying to make sense of what he's seeing.

Then he turns and walks away.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – BRIDGE – LATER

The vessel's command center is full of quiet, controlled activity. COMMODORE CHIEN speaks to an OFFICER as he flips through a stack of REPORTS being handed to him by another officer.

He does not notice the Operative come onto the bridge. The Operative wanders from post to post, looking over the shoulders of various SOLDIERS as they work.

CHIEN (OS)

Sir?

The Operative continues to meander. Chien follows, carrying the pile of reports.

CHIEN (cont'd)
It's good to see you out of the infirmary, sir.

Chien is battered, tired. Relieved to have the Operative there.

CHIEN (cont'd)
Are you ready to assume com—?

Chien stops abruptly. The Operative is practically staring through him.

CHIEN (cont'd)
Are you all right, sir? Should I contact the medical staff?

OPERATIVE
What?

CHIEN
Is something wrong, sir? Is there anything I can do?

OPERATIVE
(slow shake of his head)
There's nothing you can do. Nothing any of us can do.

Uncomfortable beat.

CHIEN
We've, ah, just received an update from Admiral Rina. Her element reports success. The Reavers have been defeated or routed. Similar news from the surface, although Brust thinks it could be several weeks before everything is cleaned up.

The Operative doesn't appear to be listening.

CHIEN (cont'd)
It's a qualified success, sir. Heavy casualties all around, but the battle appears to be over.

He tries to hand a folder to the Operative, but the Operative doesn't take it.

OPERATIVE
(staring at the folder)
What is this?

CHIEN
Casualty list. Prepared by Admiral Rina. Once Weis and Brust have time to submit full reports, I suspect it will be much longer.

The Operative turns away, leaving Chien standing there, folder out.

OPERATIVE
It's so quiet here.

CHIEN
Um.
(beat)
Yes, sir.

The Operative turns back to Chien. Claps him on the shoulder with his good hand.

OPERATIVE
You're doing an excellent job, Louis.

CHIEN
I... Thank you, sir.

The Operative starts to leave, but Chien catches him at the door.

CHIEN
There's another matter I need to discuss with you.
(discreetly)
We've received multiple inquiries from Parliament.
They're asking for you, sir. They want a status report.

OPERATIVE
Take care of it.

CHIEN
What should I tell them, sir?

OPERATIVE
(shrugs)
Send them the casualty report.

He walks off.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – MILITARY BRIG

Zoe lies in the far cot again. Jayne paces. Ben stands.

BEN
Well, it's a good sign, right? I mean, he took her to see them.
(beat)
So that's... It's good, right?

JAYNE

Yeah, sure. Good for 'Nara. Rest of us'll be pounding rocks 'til the end of days.

BEN

There's always ways outta that. Dead is dead, though.

ZOE

(not looking up)

These are the same folk who slaughtered Haven.

BEN

What are you saying?

ZOE

We can't trust them. Can't trust a word they say.

Jayne grunts in agreement. Ben punches the frame of the cot in frustration.

BEN

What can we do?

She sits up suddenly, facing them.

ZOE

You two are welcome to do as you please.

(hard look)

I reckon on killing the man responsible for all this.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – INFIRMARY – OPERATING THEATER

Mal and Simon are both here, unconscious, hooked up to all sorts of machinery. A lone DOCTOR works on Simon, his back to Mal.

He's got Simon open, and it's a red, red mess.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – INFIRMARY – HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

Kaylee and Inara stand in the hallway, about two yards apart from one another, both looking through a window into the operating theater. Inara stands in front of Mal, and Kaylee closer to Simon.

Inara is serene, inscrutable. Kaylee cries quietly.

KAYLEE

There's so much blood...

Inara moves to comfort her.

INARA

Mei mei.

(quietly)

<Everything will be fine>. Simon is—

Urgent TONES beep loud enough that they can be heard in the hallway. Kaylee looks stricken, but the doctor turns away from Simon – because the muted beeping is coming from Mal's life support equipment.

Inara gasps in surprise.

KAYLEE

(panicked)

Can he do that?

(pointing at Simon)

Can he leave in the middle?!?

Inara opens her mouth to respond. But before she can—

Mal FLATLINES.



Act Two

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – INFIRMARY

CLOSE ON Simon's closed eyes. In the background, the sound of all sorts of hospital machines.

His eyes flutter and open.

SIMON

(weak)

Kaylee?

PULL BACK – just a little – to find Simon in a hospital bed.

OPERATIVE (OS)

Not quite.

The Operative sits in a chair next to him, reading a book. Evidently, some time has passed – his arm is no longer in a sling.

We stay tight, claustrophobic, on them as Simon struggles to sit up. The Operative puts down his book.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Here, let me help you.

Simon looks horrified as the Operative helps him adjust himself in the bed.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Kaylee said you wanted to speak with me?

SIMON
Where is she?

OPERATIVE
Kaylee? In the cafeteria, with Inara. I imagine she'll be disappointed she wasn't here to greet you when you woke again.

He fusses over Simon's covers.

SIMON
Just... Stop that.

The Operative leans back. Waits.

SIMON
Where is she?

OPERATIVE
You don't mean Kaylee.

SIMON
I need to see her.

OPERATIVE
I cannot allow that. I'm sorry.

SIMON
I need to see her.

The Operative looks across the room, away from Simon.

OPERATIVE
Doctor Tam, you're an intelligent man, so I will give you the benefit of the doubt and assume that your injuries have affected your judgment.

(turns to Simon)
You are not in control. I am.
(leans forward)
Your sister is safe for the time being, I can assure you of that. But I cannot allow you to see her.

SIMON

That's not—

OPERATIVE

(sharply)

Acceptable?

(beat)

I am the arbiter of what is acceptable on this vessel and I promise you this: you will not see your sister.

Simon starts to protest, but the Operative motions him to silence.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Your family has money and influence, Doctor Tam. With the right barristers, your legal predicament could be rectified.

(beat)

You can have your life back.

Simon stares straight ahead.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Do you understand me? You can have your life back... If you do not challenge me.

SIMON

I need to see her.

The Operative shakes his head sadly; he's dealing with a child.

OPERATIVE

Are you familiar with El Dorado?

SIMON

(confused)

The prison moon or the Earth-That-Was legend?

OPERATIVE

Do you know why they call it El Dorado? The city of gold? The sun doesn't set. Ever. On a good day, the temperature can drop to one hundred degrees in the shade. Inmates beg to be allowed to work in the mines, I have been told. After a few weeks, assuming they survive, they'll offer... favors.

SIMON

I'm not afraid—

OPERATIVE

(ignoring him)

And that, Doctor Tam, is just the environment. The work is torturous. Lethal. The accident rate is astronomical, as is the suicide rate. Not surprisingly, of course. And then there are the rape gangs... I will not bore you with the details, but suffice it to say, whatever you imagine El Dorado to be, it's far worse.

Simon looks at him defiantly.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

How long do you imagine Kaylee will last?

Simon deflates. Not the threat he was expecting.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Or Inara. Or Washburne. Even Cobb, for that matter.

The Operative stands, looming over Simon.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

You've done all you can for your sister. But there are things that are beyond your power. You, and perhaps your friends, have a rare opportunity at a second chance, Doctor Tam. But make no mistake, that door closes if you challenge my authority.

Simon glares up at him, sullen and weary.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Now... Do you have any more questions for me?

Simon doesn't.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

(nods)

I'm glad we have an understanding, Doctor Tam. If you'll excuse me...

Simon watches the Operative walk away. Then he drops back against the pillows, tears in his eyes.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – MILITARY BRIG

Zoe, Jayne, and Ben cluster together, talking in low tones.

ZOE

I'm fair certain that won't work either, unless the goal is to die three steps clean of this cage.

JAYNE

(frustrated)

Well, then, I'm just fresh out of ideas.

ZOE

(under her breath)

That's surprising.

JAYNE

They're gonna have to open that door eventually.

ZOE

Maybe.

BEN

We even sure this is this brightest decision we can make?

Zoe levels a scary look at him. He looks down and away.

BEN (cont'd)

I mean, we're on an Alliance ship. Once we get out, where're we gonna go? What're we gonna do?

ZOE

(disgusted)

You wanna die in this box, that's your call, but I won't be slaughtered like some animal.

She grabs Ben roughly, getting in his face.

ZOE (cont'd)

That what you want?

BEN

Hey, I'm sorry, I—

Jayne puts a hand on Zoe's arm, yanking her away from Ben.

JAYNE

I'm getting' a little sick o' you lady, thinkin' you're the boss of us all. Mal ain't here, an' you ain't captain!

Zoe wheels on Jayne, cocking her fist—

ZOE
Don't you touch me, you damned—

—and her elbow SLAMS into Ben's nose with a CRACK.

And it's chaos as Ben falls, blood flowing from his nose, and Zoe and Jayne are at each other's throats.

BEN
(nasally)
My nose!

Jayne barrels into Zoe, slamming her back into the cots. She snaps a fist into his throat. He takes a step back, coughing, but manages to backhand her across the jaw.

Zoe spits blood, and the two prep for another round—

OPERATIVE (OS)
I'm half inclined to see how far you're willing to go with this charade.

Zoe and Jayne freeze in mid-punch.

The Operative stands alone outside the cell.

ZOE
How long have you known?

OPERATIVE
Your "escape plan" has been allowed to progress only because the guards were wagering on when the attempt would occur. They have been reprimanded.

Zoe moves toward the clear wall.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
I'm somewhat impressed by your dedication to this façade.

BEN
(from the floor)
I think my nose really is broke...

Zoe is now face-to-face with the Operative.

OPERATIVE

(shakes his head)

Did you really believe you'd be successful? That you could escape from an Alliance super-cruiser? Freedom is an impossibility.

ZOE

Sone the impossible before.

OPERATIVE

You've accomplished quite a bit, I'll grant, but don't forget who you are. A second-rate crew of criminals on some garbage scow of a ship.

ZOE

The Captain—

OPERATIVE

Has died.

Dead silence.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

Your precious Captain Reynolds is no hero of legend, but a man. Men are born and die, and he has died.

It hits the prisoners like a shockwave. Zoe seems to age in an instant. Ben, still on the floor, rocks back. Jayne drops to sit on one of the cots.

ZOE

(small)

No.

OPERATIVE

Yes. I'm sorry to say, but your captain is as mortal as any man. As mortal as you or I. Or your husband.

ZOE

(smoldering)

Open that door for thirty seconds and we'll see who's most mortal.

OPERATIVE

Are you really that anxious to follow your captain?

ZOE

To hell and back already. What's one more trip?

Zoe and the Operative stare at one another for a long moment, then he looks past her, dismissing her, to Ben.

OPERATIVE

I'll send a medic to look at your nose. I trust that none of you will do anything <pig-foolish> to throw your lives away. That would be an unfortunate waste.

He starts to leave.

BEN

What do you care?

The Operative pauses, turns.

OPERATIVE

Excuse me?

BEN

What's it to you if we throw our lives away? You've already killed most folk we know, what's a few more on your conscience? Come to that, why didn't you kill me on Universe's moon?

OPERATIVE

You misunderstand. My conscience has nothing to do with this. Every death I've been responsible for has been necessary. Your deaths here and now—or your death on the moon—would serve no purpose.

He turns his back to them and begins to walk away.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

(softly)

<None of it means a damned thing>.

INT. ALLIANCE SUPERCRUISER – INFIRMARY – HALLWAY

Kaylee pushes Simon's wheelchair; Inara walks next to them. They're all tired, drained, pensive. Inara looks the worst, her clothing uncharacteristically disheveled, bags under her eyes, her hair pulled into a sloppy ponytail.

They turn a corner to find the Operative waiting for them.

Simon doesn't even react. Inara and Kaylee exchange a look, and Kaylee moves on, pushing Simon, leaving Inara alone with the Operative.

An uncomfortable silence sets in as Kaylee wheels Simon away.

OPERATIVE

Commodore Chien tells me you have not moved into the quarters allocated to you.

INARA

I'm not leaving the infirmary. Especially not now.

They begin to walk.

OPERATIVE

I... understand.

(beat)

I wanted to speak to you about that.

She doesn't look at him.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)

What is it about Reynolds that he commands such loyalty? Washburne would follow him into the afterlife.

INARA

And she's not the only one.

(turning to look at him)

I don't think you can ever understand. I'm not sure I can either, but I know this: Mal is everything you're not, and you're everything he's not. And when the two of you are placed on the scales, you're the one who's found wanting.

(not cruel, just the facts)

On your best day, you'll never be a fraction of the man he is on his worst.

She walks off after Kaylee and Simon, leaving him alone.

INT. SHUTTLE

The Operative sits at the controls.

CHIEN (via com)

I understand, sir, I just... I'm not sure this is the best time.

The Operative works the controls.

CHIEN (via com, cont'd)

Minister Ying has commed for you again.

OPERATIVE

Who?

CHIEN (via com)
Minister... The, ah, the new Minister of Defense.

The Op stares blankly for a beat. Then:

OPERATIVE
Oh. Of course.

The Operative works the controls. The SOUND OF THE ENGINE shifts: landing.

CHIEN (via com)
Some of the men are talking, sir. The unorthodox
treatment of the prisoners... Shouldn't River Tam have
been interrogated by now? Or transferred?

The Operative begins to power down the shuttle.

CHIEN (via com)
There are rumors. I've heard that Admiral Rina is looking
to open a formal investigation.

The Operative unbuckles stands, keeping his eyes forward.

CHIEN (via com, cont'd)
I think if you can, sir, you should probably return here as
quickly as possible.

OPERATIVE
Soon, Louis.

He shuts off the com system.

REVERSE ANGLE TO SEE WHAT THE OPERATIVE IS SEEING

Framed by the forward viewport: SERENITY faces the shuttle. The Firefly is where
the crew left it, surrounded by wreckage and bodies, tilted at a slight angle,
thrusters torn off.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

The cargo bay is dark. The Operative stands in the open cargo bay door, silhouetted
by dim light.

He steps into the cargo bay, turning on a PORTABLE TORCH.

As he walks through the silent cargo bay, he aims the torch around. We catch
images in the darkness:

Panels have come loose. Corpses from Haven, some loose, others still in makeshift coffins, are strewn about the room. Crates and tools are everywhere. The place is a mess.

The Operative picks his way through the darkness to

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY – CONTINUOUS

He pokes his head and the portable torch into the infirmary.

Things are much the same here. Cabinets have popped open. Pills and broken glass litter the angled floor.

He backs up and heads through

INT. SERENITY – PASSENGER DORM – CONTINUOUS

Leading with the portable torch, the Operative winds his way through overturned chairs and heads up a flight of stairs.

The Operative's footfalls are the only noise, a sinister, sepulcher sound.

At the top of the stairs, he enters THE AFT HALLWAY, which leads to

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM – CONTINUOUS

A HISSING NOISE is heard in the engine room. The Operative plays the portable torch through the darkness.

Things aren't as bad here as some of the other rooms, but the source of the sound—a broken pipe venting STEAM—is revealed by the light.

The Operative looks around for a moment, then heads back down THE AFT HALLWAY to

INT. SERENITY – DINING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

He pauses at the table, which is covered with WEAPONS that were DUCT-TAPED there in Episode 2x20: "A Leaf on the Wind." The Operative runs a hand over the arsenal. Most of the weapons are intact, but some look like they've been torn off and others hang ajar, knocked partially-loose by the crash.

Leaving the weapons behind, the Operative exits to

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALL – CONTINUOUS

There's little too see here.

The Operative pauses before taking the small flight of stairs up to

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – CONTINUOUS

Gloomy light comes in through the SHATTERED FORWARD VIEWPORT, turning the bridge into a jumble of dimness and shadow.

The handheld torch catches the slumped form of WASH—still pinned in his chair by a MASSIVE SPIKE—then the Operative angles the light away and shuts it off.

The Operative moves a little to the side, unconsciously mirroring the location where Mal often stands.

We slowly close in on the Operative's face, as he stares ahead...

Pensive...

Thoughtful...

Searching...

And then—

He JUMPS as something in the ship falls with a CRASH.



Act Three

INT. SERENITY – INFIRMARY

CLOSE ON Mal's closed eyes.

They snap open. Mal sits up urgently. He's in the bed in the infirmary.

MAL
(disoriented)
Shepherd?

He looks around the room, confused, lost.

INARA
No, Mal.

She comes to him from a chair on the far side of the room. She still looks haggard, worn, but not as bad as the last time we saw her.

MAL

I thought...
(shakes his head)
Never mind.

He winces in pain. Looks down: he's shirtless, but with clean bandages across his abdomen. An IV runs from his arm to a drip on a ROLLING STAND. He take it all in.

MAL (cont'd)
What the hell happened?

She touches his shoulder.

INARA

You died, Mal.

MAL
Seems I do that a little too much of that.

INARA
(warm smile)
I don't disagree.

He lies back in the bed, processing it all.

MAL
This the afterlife? Because, I gotta tell you, pretty
<goddamned disappointing>. I was expecting virgins—no
offense—and a choir. Maybe a nice spread of cakes and
pies...

INARA
(not unkindly)
I thought you didn't believe in anything.

Mal looks down, suddenly serious and thoughtful.

MAL
The signal... Did it...?

INARA
It got through. It changed...

She gets up, walks to one of the counters, where she has a stack of NEWSPAPERS, some of simple paper, some with MOVING ACETATE, shifting HEADLINES. She shuffles through, selects a few, and brings them back to Mal.

He looks at them. The headlines include:

ARIEL RIOTS LEAD TO NEW ELECTIONS

SEVEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT BOUND BY LAW

FORMER MINISTER OF EXPANSION COMMITS SUICIDE

This last one carries a picture of the old man with the gun from the teaser.

INARA (cont'd)
(whispered)
...everything.

Mal smiles as he looks at the headlines.

MAL
(to himself)
Told him it wouldn't be for nothin'.

He settles in to read one of the articles—

But there's a huge CLANG from outside the infirmary, followed by:

KAYLEE (OS)
No, no, no! What did I tell you?!?

Mal looks up at Inara, confused anew.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Kaylee and about a half dozen ALLIANCE ENGINEERS are in the cargo bay, working on various things.

Kaylee's hands are on her hips and she's looking at one of the engineers. There's a heavy wall panel on the floor at their feet, and the engineer looks contrite.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
What did I say?

She points at BUNDLE OF CABLES in the area revealed by the fallen panel.

KAYLEE (cont'd)
This cable is fifth gauge. I said nothing higher than third!

ENGINEER
We don't have anything lower than—

KAYLEE

What did I say?

(exasperated)

Ship can't take that kinda output. Wrong wirin' and we might as well just stick some <monkey-handled> fireworks—

BAKER

Lambert was just doing what I told him to.

Kaylee turns as Baker joins them.

BAKER (cont'd)

'less you want to run another salvage op, fifth gauge is the best we got. But we routed it through a secondary processor, which should—

KAYLEE

—take the pressure off my baby's systems.

BAKER

(nods)

Exactly.

KAYLEE

(brightly)

That'll do for today.

(to Lambert)

Sorry I snapped.

ACROSS THE CARGO BAY

Mal and Inara watch. Mal leans on Inara and his IV stand.

KAYLEE (OS, cont'd)

Ain't used to bein' all in charge like this.

MAL

(to Inara, stunned)

You sure I ain't dead?

KAYLEE (OS)

Cap'n!

Kaylee runs up to Mal, stopping just short of hugging him. She pauses, then gives him a cautious little hug, careful to avoid his injuries.

KAYLEE (cont'd)

Good to see you up'n about, Cap'n.

MAL

Good to see you...

(at a loss)

...ordering around a buncha Alliance soldiers fixin' up my ship.

KAYLEE

Some'a these purplebellies, they ain't so bad.

Mal looks at Inara.

INARA

I promise you, you're not dead.

Mal shakes his head.

MAL

So where's everybody else?

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – LATER

Mal's in the co-pilot's seat, talking to one of the WAVE MONITORS. A new pilot seat has been installed, but he doesn't even look at it.

MAL

Ain't good enough.

CHIEN (via Wave)

Captain Reynolds, it's a very generous offer. More than generous, really. We could hold your entire crew for—

MAL

Seems from what I read, you an' yours can't hold much of anything these days.

CHIEN (via Wave)

All charges will be dropped, and all registered crewmembers, as well as Doctor Tam and Mister Hawkins, will be returned within the hour.

MAL

You're a name short. I ain't goin' nowhere without my crew complete an' whole.

On the screen, Chien is visibly agitated.

CHIEN (via Wave)

Captain, this is not a negotiation—

MAL
Damn right it ain't.

He shuts off the Wave monitor.

INT. SUPERCRUISER – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Chien turns away from the blank WAVE MONITOR to look up at the Operative.

CHIEN
The man is less than reasonable.

OPERATIVE
Indeed.

Chien waits for the next order.

OPERATIVE (cont'd)
Prepare my shuttle. It's time I interrogate River Tam personally.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Simon walks in, tired and haggard, and looks around. The engineers and Kaylee are still at work.

KAYLEE
(rushing to him)
Simon!

She hugs him, and he returns it halfheartedly.

SIMON
Hey.

Mal joins them.

MAL
Good to see you up an' about, Doctor.

SIMON
I can say the same, Captain.

Kaylee takes a step back, allowing the two men a private moment.

MAL

We ain't goin' nowhere without her, Simon. You got my word.

SIMON

I... You've done so much for us already, Mal. I don't want you to risk the crew for her.

Mal puts a hand on his shoulder.

MAL

She is my crew. We ain't goin' nowhere.

INT. ALLIANCE INTERROGATION ROOM

Stark. Metal. Harsh fluorescent lights. River sits on one side of the table, staring up intently at the Operative.

They just look at each other.

Silently.

Unmoving.

For a long time.

An uncomfortably long time.

Then:

RIVER

Do you know what your sin is?

The Operative pulls out the chair and sits tiredly.

OPERATIVE

I do.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Zoe, Jayne, and Ben come in, all looking a little shocky. The engineers are still at work, and the rest of the crew (Mal, Inara, Kaylee, and Simon) speak quietly near the pile of coffins.

JAYNE

(pointing)

Hey, look! Mal ain't dead!

The crew gathers. Handshakes and hugs are exchanged all around.

MAL
Who said I was dead?

BEN
Parliament's man.

MAL
Didn't lie. Was dead, for all of sixty-eight seconds, from what I hear.

Inara and Zoe are embracing:

INARA
(softly)
Longest minute of my life.

ZOE
(quietly)
Imagine so.

JAYNE
So what's the caper, Mal?
(indicating the engineers)
We gonna take these half-wit mechanics hostage?
Exchange 'em for the loon?

KAYLEE
Jayne!

MAL
(shrugs)
Mister Parliament his own self is on the way. We'll see how that plays out. Might want to load up a few of your ladies. In case things go south.

Zoe's eyes narrow. Ben and Jayne see it, exchange a look.

EXT. SPACE ABOVE MR. UNIVERSE'S MOON

An Alliance shuttle launches from one of the picket ships.

The shuttle veers through the edge of the ion cloud and heads for the surface.

INT. OPERATIVE'S SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

The Operative is at the controls.

CHIEN (via com)
I don't... Sir, I'm not sure I heard that correctly. Could you repeat the order?

OPERATIVE
Withdraw. All vessels are to withdraw to the outer marker and wait for the arrival of Specialist Baker.

CHIEN (via com)
And you'll be with Specialist Baker?

OPERATIVE
(ignoring the question)
Once the engineers are aboard, contact Admiral Rina for further orders and reallocation of vessels. This task force is dissolved.

CHIEN (via com)
But this— This operation isn't complete.

OPERATIVE
It's dead, Louis. We've failed.

He shuts off the com.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Zoe sits in the co-pilot's seat, listening.

She shuts the COM UNIT off. She leans back in her chair, closes her eyes—

Then suddenly turns toward the door.

Ben and Jayne are there. Ben's got his laptop, and Jayne's packing a lot of heat, including VERA. Both look a little guilty.

JAYNE
We was listenin', too.

Ben hefts the computer to indicate the how of it.

ZOE
You here to stop me, then?

JAYNE

Stop you? There's lots of good folk dead while that
bastard still sucks air.

(cold grin)

Hell, that rutter <ought to be raped by a thousand rabid
baboons>.

BEN

But since we ain't got even one rabid baboon...

He puts the laptop down in front of Zoe and opens it up.

BEN (cont'd)

Way the wreckage lays out, he's most like to land here.

Ben points to an area on the screen. Jayne leans in, pointing at the screen himself.

JAYNE

So you wanna be here.

Zoe looks from the two of them to the laptop's screen.

ZOE

Not a clean shot from that distance.

JAYNE

I know you'd prefer the up-close f'r it, but this way's
safer.

BEN

A sure thing.

ZOE

(skeptical)

No such thing. And I'm no sniper.

JAYNE

Don't need to be, with my baby in hand.

He unslings Vera. Zoe stands, looks away from them.

ZOE

Captain won't like it.

JAYNE

Captain won't know.

ZOE

He'll know after, sure enough, when we're on the run.

BEN
Mal's used to that.

JAYNE
Don't imagine he'd know what to do with himself, law
wasn't on his tail.

ZOE
Could be you're right.
(turns to them)
Not how it was in my head, but the plan's sound.

She sounds almost disappointed. Ben and Jayne look at each other. She wants a suicide run.

JAYNE
There's enough dead already, Zoe. Don't be part of that pile.

He starts to hand her Vera, but she impulsively hugs him.

Before he can really react, she takes the gun and stalks off the bridge, on the hunt, leaving Jayne and Ben and the new pilot's chair behind.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – SERENITY

The damage has been repaired, and a lot of the wreckage cleared, but the landing strip is still pretty cluttered. An ALLIANCE TROOP TRANSPORT, half Serenity's size, rests at the far end of the strip.

THE OPERATIVE'S SHUTTLE

—comes in for a landing between the two vessels, facing Serenity, with maybe thirty yards between the two.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Mal, Inara, and Jayne come down the ramp, followed by Baker and her Alliance engineers (all of whom are carrying bags and equipment).

Baker and her soldiers move off to the side, while Mal, Inara, and Jayne wait at the bottom of the ramp.

The Operative walks toward them. As he approaches:

MAL
Wanna be clear on this, ain't goin' nowhere without—

The Operative holds up a silencing hand and moves to Baker.

MAL (cont'd)

And now we can add rude to the list o' things I don't like about that man.

INARA

<A drop in the bucket>, Mal.

Jayne scans the area.

The Operative reaches Baker. He looks up at Serenity appraisingly.

OPERATIVE

You've done an excellent job.

BAKER

Could take you on a tour, sir.

The Operative glances at Mal, twenty feet away, tense, at the foot of the ramp.

OPERATIVE

Her captain would not appreciate that. I do not require a tour to confirm that you've done excellent work.

BAKER

(shrugs)

You held t'your promise, got medics for my folks. Commander like that's rare. Whatever you ask, I'll do.

OPERATIVE

I have a few final orders for you, then. Your unit has been temporarily reassigned to Commodore Chien. He's a good man and likely a better commander than I. You could do far worse than to find a home with him.

She looks away, pleased but awkward.

BAKER

Thank you, sir.

OPERATIVE

The fleet is waiting at the outer marker. Rendezvous with them, and give this to Chien.

(hand her a DATACARD)

My report to Parliament.

She looks like she wants to ask him questions, but he shakes his head.

OPERATIVE

Now go.

Baker nods. She turns back to her soldiers, issuing them commands. They move out, heading toward their transport.

The Operative watches them go, then heads toward Mal, Inara, and Jayne.

MAL

Ain't goin' nowhere without my crew whole an' hearty.
Now, I ain't gonna say I much understand why you done
what you done so far, but if we ain't got River Tam—

The Operative activates a REMOTE CONTROL DEVICE, opening the ramp of his shuttle.

River walks down.

MAL (cont'd)

Oh.

River, smiling, starts to walk toward them, past the soldiers heading around her.

MAL (cont'd)

(to Jayne)

Get everyone. Get Simon.

Jayne nods and runs into the ship. Mal rushes off toward River, and Inara starts to follow, but the Operative puts a hand on her arm.

She hesitates.

OPERATIVE

I have a ship. Access to resources. We can go anywhere we want. We can... We can be whoever we want.

She looks at him with a mixture of pity and scorn.

INARA

I don't want to be with you—near you—whatever you are.

OPERATIVE

I'm not the man I was. I have learned—

INARA

Nothing.

(scoffs)

You're still the monster you were. You just can't believe your claws have been broken.

OPERATIVE
If there's any part of you that cares—

INARA
(icy)
<I pity you>. That's all.

He starts to say more, but now the crew—Jayne, Kaylee, Simon, and Ben—is rushing down the ramp, and Mal has arrived with River.

There are hugs all around.

RIVER
(to Mal)
Permission to come aboard, sir?

He gives her a big hug. Then she moves on to Simon.

She smiles, opens her mouth, but he just hugs her and starts crying.

River hugs him back for a long moment, then smiles over at Kaylee.

RIVER
Honestly, I don't know how you put up with him.

The crew starts to move up the ramp.

OPERATIVE
Captain Reynolds, a moment of your time.

Mal turns back.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

We see the Operative facing off against Mal through a sniper's scope. Crosshairs line up on the back of the Operative's head.

EXT. CATWALK – SAME TIME

Zoe crouches on a CATWALK above Serenity, aiming Vera down at the Operative.

Her expression is stone cold.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

CLOSE ON the Operative's eyes.

MAL (OS)
If you're here to tell me we ain't finished...

Mal and the Operative face off. Mal is at the foot of the ramp, the Operative maybe fifteen feet away.

MAL (cont'd)
(hand moving toward his gun)
...then we will be real quick.

OPERATIVE
Do you know what an uproar you've caused? Protests,
riots—cries for a recall of the entire Parliament.

MAL
I seen the headlines.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

Zoe targets the back of the Operative's head.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

OPERATIVE
You must be pleased.

MAL
(shrugs)
'Verse wakes up a spell. Won't be long 'fore she rolls right over and falls back asleep. Tain't my worry.

OPERATIVE
I can't guarantee they won't come after you. The Parliament. They have a hundred men like me and they are not forgiving.

MAL
That don't bode especially well for you... giving the order to let us go, patching up our hurt...

OPERATIVE

I told them the Tams were no longer a threat—damage done. They might listen, but... I think they know I'm no longer their man.

MAL

They take you down, I don't expect to grieve overmuch. Like to kill you myself, I see you again.

OPERATIVE

You won't. There is...
(small, grim smile)
...nothing left to see.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

Zoe's aim is steady.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

The Operative looks up at the ship's nose.

OPERATIVE

"Serenity." You lost everything in that battle. Everything you had, everything you were... How did you go on?

Mal looks at the Operative, unimpressed.

MAL

You're still standing there when that engine starts, you never will figure it out.

He heads up the ramp. The Operative watches him go.

MAL

(to himself)
What a whiner...

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

The Operative turns away from Serenity and begins to walk away.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – NEAR SERENITY – SAME TIME

He returns to his shuttle with a slow, measured, pace.

Almost expectant.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

Zoe tracks him.

EXT. CATWALK – SAME TIME

She lines up her shot.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – NEAR SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

He pauses, scans the area. Closes his eyes.

Waiting.

EXT. VIEW THROUGH SNIPER SCOPE – SAME TIME

The Operative says something in Mandarin, but we're too far away to hear it.

EXT. MR. UNIVERSE'S COMPLEX – NEAR SHUTTLE – SAME TIME

Nothing happens.

He looks disappointed.

Heads into the shuttle.

EXT. CATWALK – SAME TIME

Zoe cries—huge, pitiful sobs—rocking back and forth, cradling the sniper rifle.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE

Mal comes in to find Ben standing over the pilot's seat, working the console.

BEN

Just, uh, startin' the pre-flight. Hope you don't mind.

(guilty look)

In case things went south.

MAL
(shrugs)
Glad someone thought to, I suppose.

He indicates to Ben that he wants the chair. Ben nods and moves. They both look down at the console.

MAL (cont'd)
Cargo bay door's still open. Tell Jayne to lock it up. I'm more'n ready to be rid of this world.

Ben heads out, leaving Mal alone. Mal stares at the empty pilot's seat.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Ben comes down the stairs. Jayne lingers near the cargo bay door, looking out.

BEN
Where is she?

Jayne shrugs, shakes his head to indicate he doesn't know.

Then Zoe comes in, looking tired, but more composed than she did on the catwalk.

JAYNE
(to Zoe)
Didn't hear no gunshot.

She ignores him at first, instead looking over at the pile of coffins.

Jayne closes the cargo bay door; he and Ben look at one another uncomfortably.

She walks to Jayne and hands Vera back.

ZOE
<None of it means a damned thing>.

EXT. HAVEN – CEMETERY – LATER

Match-cut to Zoe, now dressed in a simple white funeral gown, holding a BURNING TAPER.

Behind her: Mal and Inara, Simon and Kaylee. Ben looks uncomfortable, and Jayne has a shovel over his shoulder.

Reverse angle and we see that they're standing before a WOODEN PLAQUE and a freshly filled in GRAVE. The name HOBAN WASHBURNE is carved into the plaque.

River crouches by the side of the grave, adjusting a small home-made ROCKET with pieces of paper taped to it. She fixes a final SLIP OF PAPER to it, then nods up to Zoe.

Zoe holds the taper to the rocket fuse. She and River back away, joining the others.

The rocket shoots up into the darkening sky. They all watch its sputtering tail a moment, then it explodes in a series of FIREWORKS.

EXT. HAVEN – TENT – LATER

The sound of the fireworks becomes a peal of THUNDER.

Most of the crew is in Haven's dining tent, a large spread of FOOD—mostly vegetables—laid out. Judging from the plates, they've recently finished eating.

Zoe stares down at her empty plate.

Kaylee and Simon sit close to one another, can't keep their hands off each other.

Jayne smokes a CIGAR, periodically looking at the two of them, uncomfortable.

River collects food, placing it in large BAGS.

Mal and Ben are a little off from the others. Ben looks up as the thunder rolls again.

BEN

Didn't even know Haven had a rainy season. Guess there's a lot I'll never learn about this place.

MAL

Listen, Ben, I know Haven was your— Well, I don't know if you got a place to go or not, but you done right by me. You more'n proved yourself. Got a bunk with your name on it, should you want it.

Ben looks into the distance.

BEN

Appreciate the offer, Mal. Surely I do. Thing of it is... I plan to live to be ripe an' old. An' from what I seen, seems maybe your boat ain't the best place for a plan like that.

Mal's not sure how to respond to that.

BEN (cont'd)

I'd take it as a kindness if you could maybe drop me off at a big port. Someplace I can get lost, y'know?

Before Mal can respond, Kaylee and Simon, laughing and grope-y, join them. Jayne watches the exchange from a distance.

SIMON

We're going back to the ship, Captain.

KAYLEE

We're, uh... I wanna check the engine some. Make sure Serenity ain't havin' no trouble with all them new Alliance do-dads stuck in her.

MAL

(nods)

Just make sure she can fly. I want to be out of the world before this storm hits hard. And it'd be nice if we don't break down between here an'... wherever it is we're headin' next.

Jayne joins Mal, glancing at Simon and Kaylee as they go.

JAYNE

Mal, I got some stuff to take care of, but I gotta talk to you 'fore liftoff.

Mal studies Jayne, whose demeanor is far more thoughtful than usual. He nods, and Jayne heads off toward the ship, too.

EXT. HAVEN – CEMETERY – LATER

Inara stands at SHEPHERD BOOK'S GRAVE, which is not far from Wash's. Nearby are dozens of COFFINS, stacked like wood.

Inara's quiet for a moment, then:

INARA

Oh, Shepherd, I wish you were here. I don't— I think you'd understand. I don't know where I belong anymore. I've seen so much... Done so much, really... I'm not sure I know what's wrong or right.

(close to tears)

I have a feeling you could've told me... I just wish—
(lets out a breathe, smiles)

If you could send me a sign, that would be something.

She dries her eyes. Stands looking down at the grave for a long moment.

Then Mal comes up behind her. Doesn't say anything, just puts a gentle hand on her shoulder.

She leans back into him.

They stay that way for a moment, then Inara breaks away.

INARA (cont'd)
I'll... If you want some time alone, I'll be at the ship.

Mal nods. Inara walks away.

Once she's gone, Mal turns to the plaque by the grave. He lets out a deep breath, looks like he wants to say something really insightful.

Settles for giving the plaque an affectionate pat.

Then he turns and slowly follows Inara.

EXT. HAVEN – SERENITY – LATER

Mal and Jayne stand at the foot of the ramp. Jayne's got a bag over his shoulder.

MAL
Sure this is what you want?

JAYNE
(shrugs)
Lot o' dead folk. Think Shepherd'd like to see someone
bury 'em.

MAL
(nods)
How long you figure?

Thunder rolls in the sky. Both men look up.

JAYNE
Two, three weeks, maybe.

MAL
Ben got the Wave workin', so you call when you're ready.
But fuel ain't cheap and this little moon ain't exactly on
the beaten path. I can't be runnin' here t'check on ya.
Could be you're here longer than you expect.

JAYNE

Little extra time to ruminate might not hurt none. These is crazy days.

MAL

I don't disagree.

They nod at each other. Jayne turns, starts to walk away. Mal heads up the ramp.

Then:

JAYNE

Hey, Mal!

Mal turns back.

JAYNE (cont'd)

What you done... Shepherd'd be proud.

Mal ponders, then smiles.

MAL

Imagine he'd feel the same 'bout what you're plannin'.

The two men stand looking at each other as the thunder sounds again. Both look like they're ready to mist over, just waiting for the other to turn away.

JAYNE

Well, what're you waitin' for! We ain't gonna hug or nothin'!

He turns and stomps off.

INT. SERENITY – CARGO BAY

Mal comes in as Zoe puts a panel back in place.

MAL

(indicates the panel)

Anything a captain ought to be concerned about?

ZOE

Can't say I love having so much Alliance patchwork here.

Mal comes over, touches the panel Zoe put back. Like a few others, it's shiny and new, contrasting sharply with the panels around it.

Zoe watches him.

MAL
(pointedly, not looking at her)
Think she'll hold together?

ZOE
She's tore up plenty. But she'll fly true.

A beat between them before:

MAL
Make sure everything's secure. Could be bumpy.

ZOE
Always is.

She takes off and Mal heads up the stairs.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM – DAY – SAME TIME

Kaylee, deeply greasy, tweaks part of the engine and crosses to the back where Simon, shirtless and not entirely ungreasy himself, is wrenching a bolt into place above his head. A moment looking at him and she can't help herself—she slides her arms around his chest...

INT. SERENITY – FOREDECK HALL – SAME TIME

Mal comes in and runs into Inara. Ben passes through as they talk—looking very much at home for someone planning to get off the ship—eating a bowl of noodles. Pays them no mind.

MAL
(to Inara)
Should be about a day's ride to get you back to your girls.

INARA
Right.

MAL
(moving past her)
You ready to get off this heap and back to civilized life?

INARA
I, uh...
(Mal stops)
I don't know.

He looks at her, a smile in his eyes.

MAL
Good answer.

He turns and heads into the bridge.

INT. SERENITY – ENGINE ROOM – SAME TIME

Kaylee and Simon are just making out like fiends, work completely forgotten. With nothing resembling elegant precision, they tumble out of frame to the floor.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal eases himself in the pilot's chair. Takes a moment to adjust Wash's dashboard dinosaurs, then looks to his left.

MAL
You gonna ride shotgun, help me fly?

River is in the copilot's seat, looking intently at the screens and buttons.

RIVER
That's the plan.

MAL
Think you can work out how to get her in the—

She is flipping switches without even looking, as the ship hums to life.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

Her engines fire up and tilt. She lifts gently off the ground.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal looks slightly, only slightly, nonplussed.

MAL (cont'd)
Okay, clearly some aptitude for the... but it ain't all buttons and charts, little albatross. You know what the first rule of flying is? Well, I suppose you do, since you already know what I'm about to say.

RIVER
I do. But I like to hear you say it.

He looks out at the rain on his windows, at his screens, taking her up as he says:

MAL

Love. You can learn all the math in the 'verse but you take a boat in the air you don't love, she'll shake you off just as sure as the turning of worlds. Love keeps her in the air when she oughta fall down, tells you she's hurting 'fore she keens. Makes her a home.

EXT. HAVEN – CEMETERY – SAME TIME

Jayne, already digging in the mud as the rain pours down on him, pauses in his work and looks up as Serenity passes overhead.

INT. SERENITY – BRIDGE – SAME TIME

Mal and River look out at the sky.

RIVER

Storm's getting worse.

MAL

We'll pass through it soon enough.

EXT. SERENITY – SAME TIME

We shoot up with her through sheeting rain, towards the top of the sky.

EXT. SPACE – MOMENTS LATER

We are looking down on the storm clouds as Serenity bursts out of them, comes at us, flared by the sun behind Haven as she passes us, her Firefly effect lighting up, about to shoot off into the heavens—

There is a SPARK and a PIECE OF PANELING pops off, whips at the camera, blacking out the frame.

MAL (OS)

What was that?

BLACKOUT